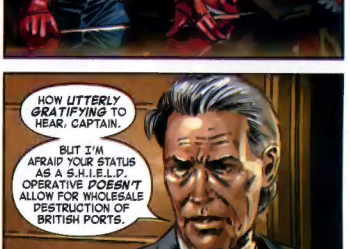
--MASSIVE EXPLOSION TORE THROUGH A SHIP IN TILBURY DOCK LATE LAST NIGHT...
...WITH FIRE SPREADING TO WAREHOUSE BUILDINGS DOCKSIDE.
NO WORD AS YET FROM OFFICIALS WHETHER THIS WAS AN ACCIDENT OR AN ACT OF TERRORISM.
LIVE
BBC PORT EXPLOSION
BBC PORT
HOWEVER, MOMENTS AGO, BBC NEWS WAS GIVEN SECURITY CAMERA FOOTAGE OF AN ALTERCATION ON BOARD THE FREIGHTER JUST PRIOR TO EXPLOSION.
TWO FIGURES ARE CLEAR IN THE FOOTAGE, UNION JACK AND THE U.S. HERO, CAPTAIN AMERICA.
WE EXPECT COMMENT ON THIS SHORTLY, AS CLEARLY, AUTHORITIES HAVE SOME EXPLAINING TO DO...

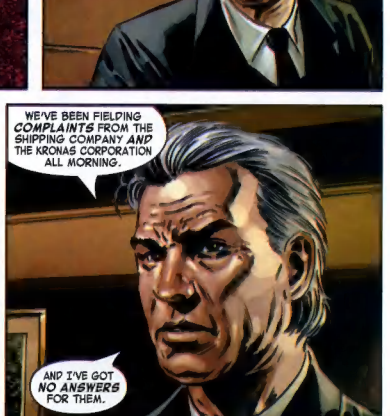
Thames House, Headquarters Of The British Security Service
WHEN YOU'RE ON BRITISH SOIL, YOU ARE A PART OF MI-5, AGENT CHAPMAN...

...AND YOU DO NOT SIMPLY RUSH INTO THINGS WITHOUT MY SAY-SO.
YEAH, I KNOW, GAVIN...THIS WASN'T MEANT TO BE ANYTHIN' MORE THAN A RECON MISSION.
I DON'T CARE WHAT SORT OF--

LINION JACK WAS HELPING ME, MR. GAVIN...
AND IT WAS THANKS TO HIM AND SPITFIRE THAT NO INNOCENT LIVES WERE LOST IN THAT EXPLOSION.


HOW UTTERLY GRATIFYING TO HEAR, CAPTAIN.
BUT I'M AFRAID YOUR STATUS AS A S.H.I.E.L.D. OPERATIVE DOESN'T ALLOW FOR WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION OF BRITISH PORTS.

THAT BLOODY BOMB WAS THERE LONG BEFORE WE WERE, GAVIN!
IT WAS A FAILSAFE IN CASE ANYONE GOT TOO CLOSE!
TOO CLOSE TO WHAT, IS THE QUESTION.


WE'VE BEEN FIELDING COMPLAINTS FROM THE SHIPPING COMPANY AND THE KRONAS CORPORATION ALL MORNING.
AND I'VE GOT NO ANSWERS FOR THEM.

THESE TWO ARE FROM AN A.I.M. SPLINTER GROUP, NOW GOING BY THE NAME R.A.I.D.
RADICALLY ADVANCED IDEAS IN DESTRUCTION.
WHAT? WE'VE GOT A CRIME SCENE HERE?
APPARENTLY. WHO CALLED THIS IN?
MI-5 GOT A HIT FROM A SURVEILLANCE CAMERA OUT ON THE CORNER.
RIGHT. SO WHAT'RE THESE NAZI SUPERMEN DOIN' MEETIN' WITH THE TERROR SCIENTISTS, THEN?
I THINK YOU'D BETTER TAKE A LOOK AT THIS, SHARON.
WHAT IS IT?
YOU'D KNOW BETTER THAN I WOULD...
...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE PART OF A PLAN FOR AN AIR ASSAULT ON LONDON.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Lots of letters this time, more than ever, really. And a lot of them about the mail from issue #17, the "Crossbones Hearts Torture" controversy, as it's known around these parts, so I'm just going to jump right in and let you speak for yourselves. As usual, I've had to trim letters for space consideration. Edit, people, edit…

I've read comic books for over 20 years now. Oddly enough, I've never felt the urge to commit acts of violence on people, objectify women, or any other assorted heinous acts I've seen super-villains perform. Instead, I've increased my vocabulary, learned a sense of right and wrong, and broadened my imagination. Of course, all this was not only due to comic books. I had damn good parents, too. That's what bugs me about the responses from Mr. Boyce and Mr. Braun. They took the worst possible meaning from the book and used it in the worst possible way: blaming America's ills on a comic book.

Delvin
via e-mail

Ed printed two letters in issue #17 regarding issue #15's controversial story. I applaud him for printing the critical letters along with the positive. I urge Rodney Boyce and Daniel Braun to re-read issue #15. I read it twice. I took several days to think about the story and both readers' responses.

Ed lays out the story perfectly: 1)"…but the Red Skull, he was in a whole 'nother league than that crazy %$#*&…". Crossbones says, comparing Roman emperor Caligula (known for cruelty) to the Red Skull. 2) Crossbones, referring to the Red Skull, says to Synthia,"…you used to see the world his way…" 3) Synthia, drifting in and out of consciousness, recalls biting through the neck of a S.H.I.E.L.D. employee during a S.H.I.E.L.D. deprogramming session. 4) Further into the story, Crossbones says to Synthia, "You were a brutal little beast of a girl…a royal terror."

Crossbones is deprogramming Synthia into her true self, Sin. The violence is graphic, I agree. But, it's within the context of Crossbones AND Sin's characters; I don't think the presentation of the story's violence was gratuitous. It's important to note that Sin is the Red Skull's true daughter in every way; Synthia Schmidt is the pseudo-personality fabricated by S.H.I.E.L.D. programming.

If any reader commits an act of violence against *anybody* after reading CAPTAIN AMERICA #15, they were on their dark path *way* before Ed's story.

Lawyer/author Andrew Vachss has often stated, "We create our own monsters." Humans, if you can call them that, perpetrate physical, psychological and sexual abuse every single moment and day; this is the equation that creates human monsters. However, these monsters still have a choice to do good or evil.

Sophea Uk
Salem, OR

Thanks Sophea, I'm a fan of Vachss, too, a writer whose work has generally been pretty disturbing. But I can never look away.

My two cents on the raging debate over issue #15: Fellow readers seem to be pretty upset about the torture/brainwashing of Synthia Schmidt. Good. You're supposed to be upset. The issue was supposed to make you feel uncomfortable. It's supposed to make you hate Crossbones. I've read CAP on and off for many years, and Crossbones has been kind of B-List to me for a long time. Not anymore. I hate that S.O.B. That's thanks to issue #15.

To claim that #15 is going to be responsible for the abuse of girls is…well…irresponsible. There's a little thing we seem to keep forgetting in America called "parenting." We can't blame questionable media for kids doing crazy things. Good parenting defeats questionable media material every time. My brother's kids play video games and read tons of comics and they're probably the best-behaved kids I've ever met. By the time this letter sees print (if it sees print) I'll be a proud poppa to a boy named Jordan. I plan to take an interest in what he's reading, watching, and playing. I intend to let him read #15 when he gets to the comic-reading stage of his life and I'll happily discuss with him the right and wrong of everything that happens in that issue. I'm hoping he grows up to be Captain America.

Capt. Jarrod "J-Bone" Alberich, USAF
Lackland AFB, TX

Congrats, Jarrod, we all wish you and your family all the best.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH: If you could take one Marvel super hero tool--like Cap's shield, DD's billyclub, Spidey's web-shooters, etc.--what would it be?

Ed Brubaker: Spidey's web-shooters, without question. The non-organic ones, that is.

Steve Epting: The Fantastican. No more road rage.

Frank D'Armata: Luke Cage's, it's a woman-pleaser! Nuff said!

Molly Lazar: Well, I've already got Elektra's sais, so it probably wouldn't be a good idea to try to rob my apartment…

Aubrey Sitterson: I'd love to get my hands on Dr. Strange's Wand of Watoomb--though I might have to fight Wong for it.

Andy Schmidt: Thor's hammer. I just want to be worthy of something.

Tom Brevoort: Ultimate Nullifier. But I'll settle for my crowbar.

This month's question was submitted by Jason Nancarrow.

CAPTAIN AMERICA is one of the best comics in the comic book medium at the moment. As far as I am concerned, Ed Brubaker and the rest of the team are producing the definitive Cap without any disrespect to some great writers and artists who came before. On another subject, I also appreciate Mr. Brubaker's tendency to allow freedom of speech in the letters page (thereby honoring the title of the page). I found the controversies and concerns surrounding issue #15 particularly engaging. To be honest, when I first read issue #15, I too was genuinely disgusted. But by the end of the story, however, I realized that my disgust was a good and healthy response. Torture is repulsive--no question. But this was responsible storytelling, because it didn't flinch in its depiction of evil. It was meant to be uncomfortable viewing. If it wasn't uncomfortable at all, then you must be numb. Crossbones violated Sin, not to sexually assault her but to bring back the evil person he knew was buried within. I find an echo in David Cronenberg's recent film *A History of Violence* where the evil "Joey" buried beneath Tom Stall's family man persona is resurrected through being pushed to the limit. Ed Brubaker was not being gratuitous or amoral in my book, but rather showing that the brutalization of Synthia was the only way to bring back the psychotic Sin. This was just realistic and brilliant storytelling. I am glad I felt uneasy as I read this story, because it tells me that I still have my humanity. So congratulations to Ed and the rest of the team for brave storytelling, and I trust that the stories do have a moral centre even when they are depicting evil. No sugar-coating, please, and keep it gritty!

Alister Hooke
Scotland

Thanks, Alister, and everyone (of age) should go rent A History of Violence, it is a great movie.

And luckily, we did get one letter taking the other side, too:

I'm writing to express my agreement with a couple of readers in CAPTAIN AMERICA #17 who felt that the story in issue #15 was unwarranted and exploitative. When I read that story, I too felt that it had gone too far. Despite what demographics might show about who's buying comics these days, the comic book medium itself is still presented in a format most people consider aimed at impressionable children and teenagers. And although I realize Marvel policy has removed the CCA stamp from its books, that does not give the company a blank check to plumb the depths of depravity in their comics…a circumstance I've found happening all too frequently lately. Furthermore, I was disappointed in your reply to readers' concerns which struck me as self-serving and facile. Creative freedom doesn't only give a person the right to do whatever he wants, it also gives him the choice *not* to do something. Unfortunately, for most creators in popular media these days, it seems self-restraint is an alien concept. I admit to being lulled by your first two story arcs that I found well done as I've stated a few times before, but issue #15 caught me completely by surprise. I'd become extremely suspicious of the content of comics over the last 10 years and buy very few anymore for that reason. So I guess I should thank you in a way for knocking me out of my complacency and reminding me of my previous suspicions. From now on, I'll be sure to take a closer look at whatever comics I buy and not take any for granted.

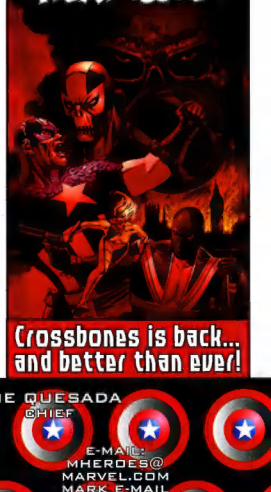
Pierre Comtois
Lowell, Ma.

PS--That said, I enjoyed immensely your 65th anniversary issue for Captain America! Any chance of a regular title concentrating on Cap and Bucky's wartime adventures?

On the CAP 65th SPECIAL--thanks. Glad you liked it. No plans for a regular WW2 comic at this point, but there will be a good amount of WW2 action in the next year of the book, I promise.

On my response to readers' concerns--it may seem simple, but as a writer I just don't feel that any subject should be taboo, and I think implying some should be leans towards asking writers to censor themselves. And trying to blame fiction for real world violence is a slippery slope that also leads to censorship. Cap is a Teen+ rated book, and I believe it meets those standards every month. I certainly would not be leery of giving it to any teenager who's ever watched prime-time television.

Ed Brubaker



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